Adult Resident Shopping Preferences and Characteristics of Businesses in Allston and Brighton, Results of Surveys , August 1988

Jeffrey Brown
Lijian Chen
Elizabeth Fitzpatrick
John Wilson

Boston Redevelopment Authority
Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department
Policy Development and Research Department

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Introduction

The Department of Neighborhood Planning and Zoning of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) conducted surveys of adult residents and businesses in Allston and Brighton during August of 1988. The purpose of the surveys was to provide the Allston-Brighton Planning and Zoning Advisory Committee with profiles of resident shoppers and of neighborhood businesses for consideration in planning and rezoning efforts.

The results described in this report are descriptive of the people and businesses who responded to the surveys. This serves the purpose of the surveys reasonably well.

The survey results must be qualified, however. The characteristics of the respondents in the surveys cannot be attributed to all adults and all businesses in the area with statistical confidence. The surveys lacked random sampling techniques and, especially regarding resident characteristics, many questions were too ambiguous to produce reliable responses. See comments and suggestions on the survey methods in the last section of this report.

Nonetheless, the survey results do offer impressions of adult shopper attitudes and of business characteristics in the neighborhood. The survey responses provide more insight into the Allston and Brighton than would casual observations in the field.

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Nonetheless, the survey results do offer impressions of adult resident attitudes and of business characteristics in the neighborhood. The survey responses provide more insight into the Allston and Brighton than would casual observations in the field.

Survey Findings

Resident Survey: 386 completed questionnaires

The resident survey was, with one exception, a survey of adults. While the questionnaire did not explicitly exclude youths, the persons who filled out the questionnaires were likely to be adults, and the survey instructions did not ask for ages of all household members.

Of those adult residents who responded to the survey, 32 percent were 55 years of age or older, another 27 percent were 35 to 54 years, and only 8 percent were under 25 years of age. See Figure 1.

The survey respondents did not represent the entire adult population of Allston-Brighton, as evidenced by the contrast in the age composition for the 1988 survey and the age composition of the adult population found in the 1980 Census. The Census found that 24 percent of the adults were over 55 years of age, 15 percent were 35 to 54 years, and 32 percent were 20 to 24 years of age. While the age composition may have changed over the eight years between the Census and the BRA survey, the changes would not have been so large. In fact, the BRA's 1985 household survey found an age composition for all Allston-Brighton household residents that was not much different from that of the 1980 Census[1]. Therefore, the 1988 survey most likely over-

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Of those adult residents who responded to the survey, 62 percent were 55 years of age or older, another 17 percent were 35 to 54 years, and only 4 percent were under 35 years of age. (See Figure 1).

The survey respondents did not represent the entire adult population of Allston-Brighton, as evidenced by the contrast in the age composition of the 1988 survey and the age composition of the adult population found in the 1980 Census. The Census found that 24 percent of the adults were over 55 years of age, 25 percent were 35 to 54 years, and 51 percent were 18 to 34 years of age. While the age composition may have changed over the eight years between the Census and the BRA survey, the changes would not have been so large. In fact, the BRA's 1985 household survey found an age composition for all Allston-Brighton household residents that was not much different from that of the 1980 Census[1]. Therefore, the 1988 survey most likely over-

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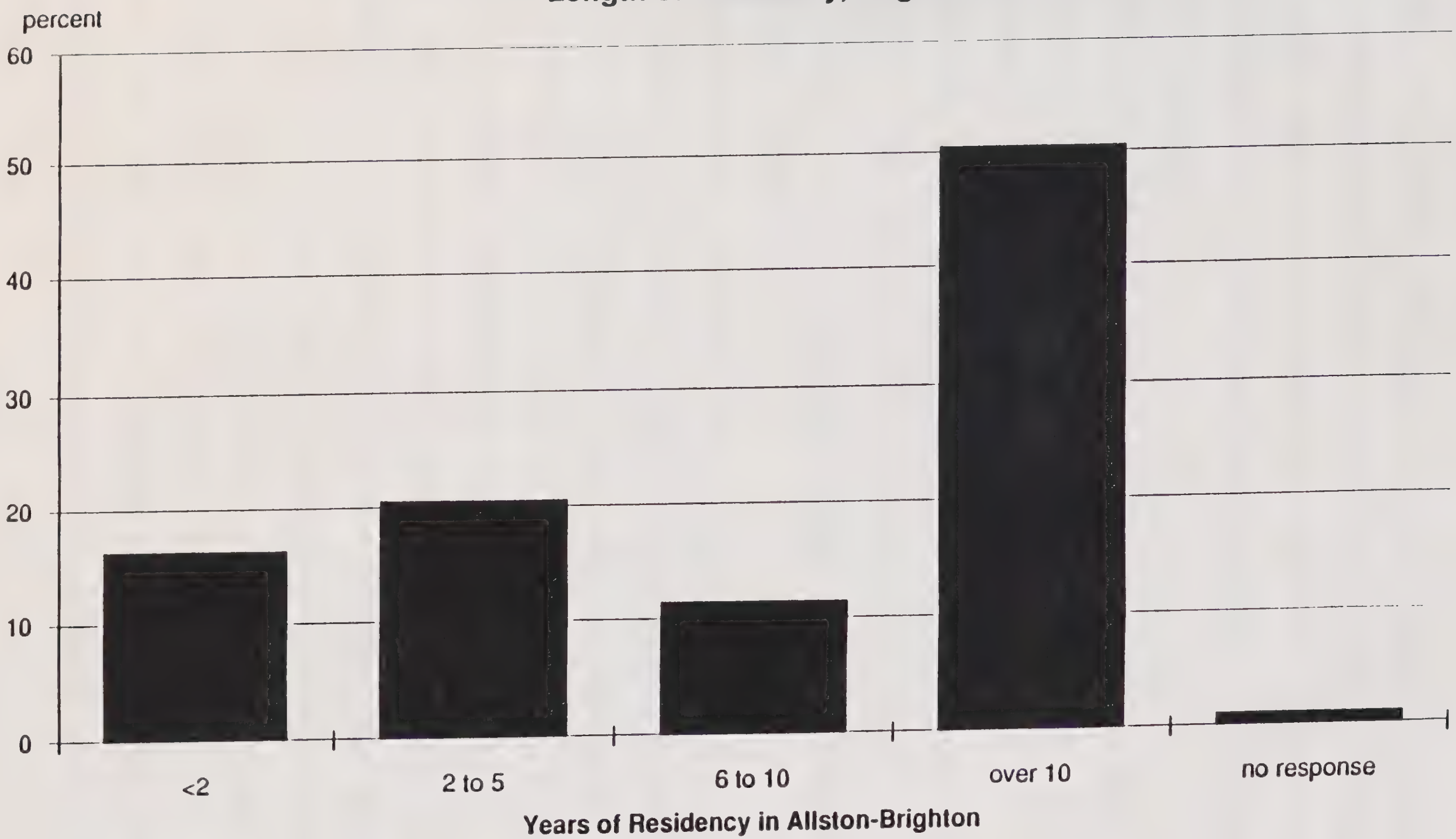
Figure 2. Allston-Brighton Resident Survey Profile: Length of Residency, August 1988



Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

represented adults 35 years of age and over, and under-represented adults under age 25.

More than half of the respondents on the resident survey had lived in Allston-Brighton over 10 years, while only 17 percent had lived in the district for less than two years. See Figure 2. Of those residents who answered the questionnaire, only 5 percent were full-time students.

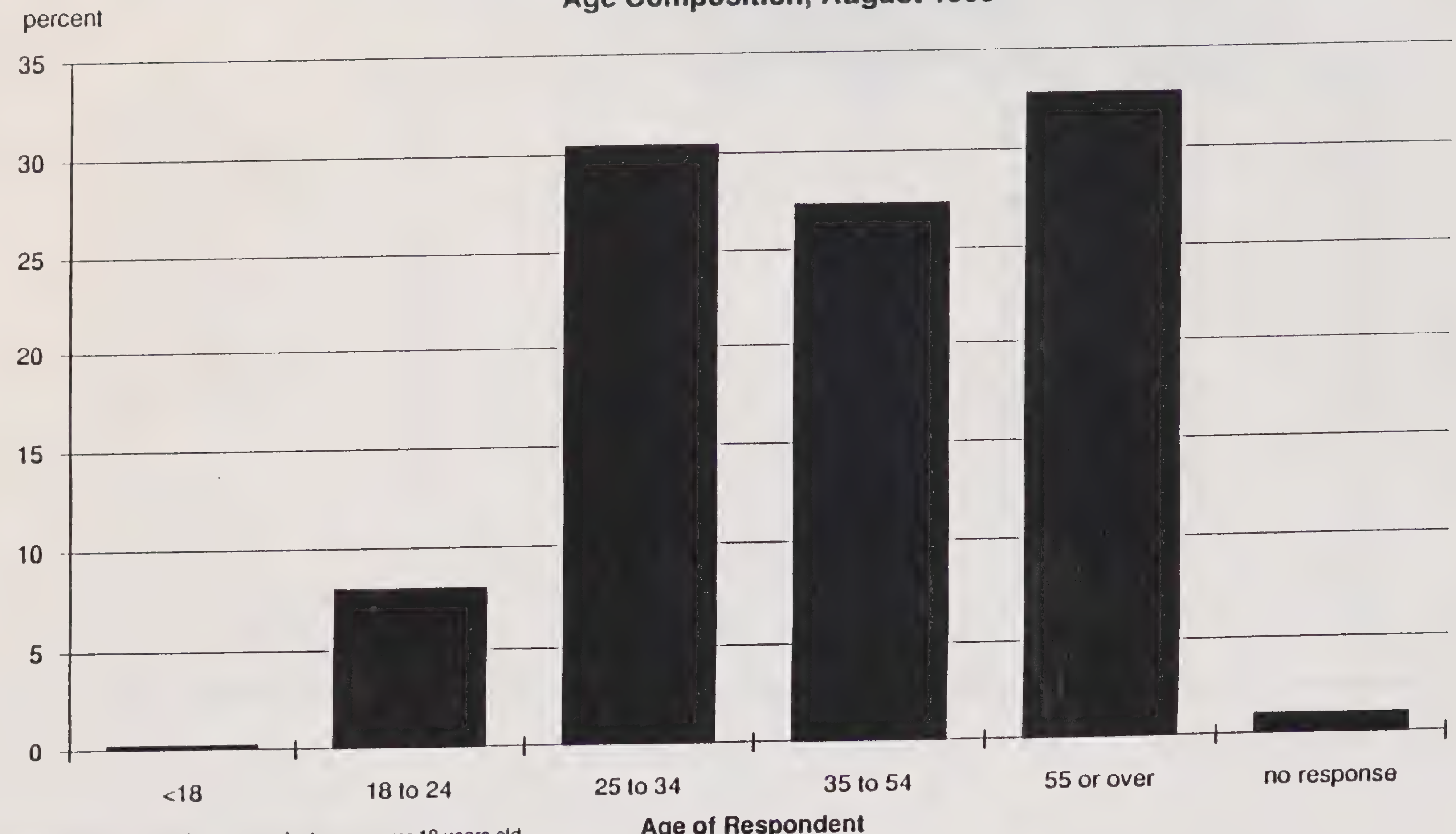
By location, the respondents were concentrated in Oak Square, N.Allston/N.Brighton, and N.Beacon/Market, three of Allston-Brighton's ten neighborhoods. The other seven neighborhoods were well represented, but two, Washington Heights and B.U./Allston, each had less than 5 percent of the respondents. See Table R1, far right column for the distribution of responses by neighborhood.

Housing tenure in Allston-Brighton was mixed. Nearly half of the survey respondents rented an apartment, while 44 percent owned their house and 3.6 percent owned their condominium. See Figure 3. Compared to the 1985 household survey, this resident survey under-represented renters and condominium owners.

The racial composition of the resident survey respondents was quite similar to the composition found in the 1985 household survey, although Asians were under-represented: Asians comprised 4 percent of all persons in the resident survey and 12 percent of the total in the 1985 household survey. See Figure 4.

In brief, the residents who completed the questionnaires tended to be older, long-time residents. Residents who did not

Figure 1. Allston-Brighton Resident Survey Profile
Age Composition, August 1988



Note: With one reception, respondents were over 18 years old.

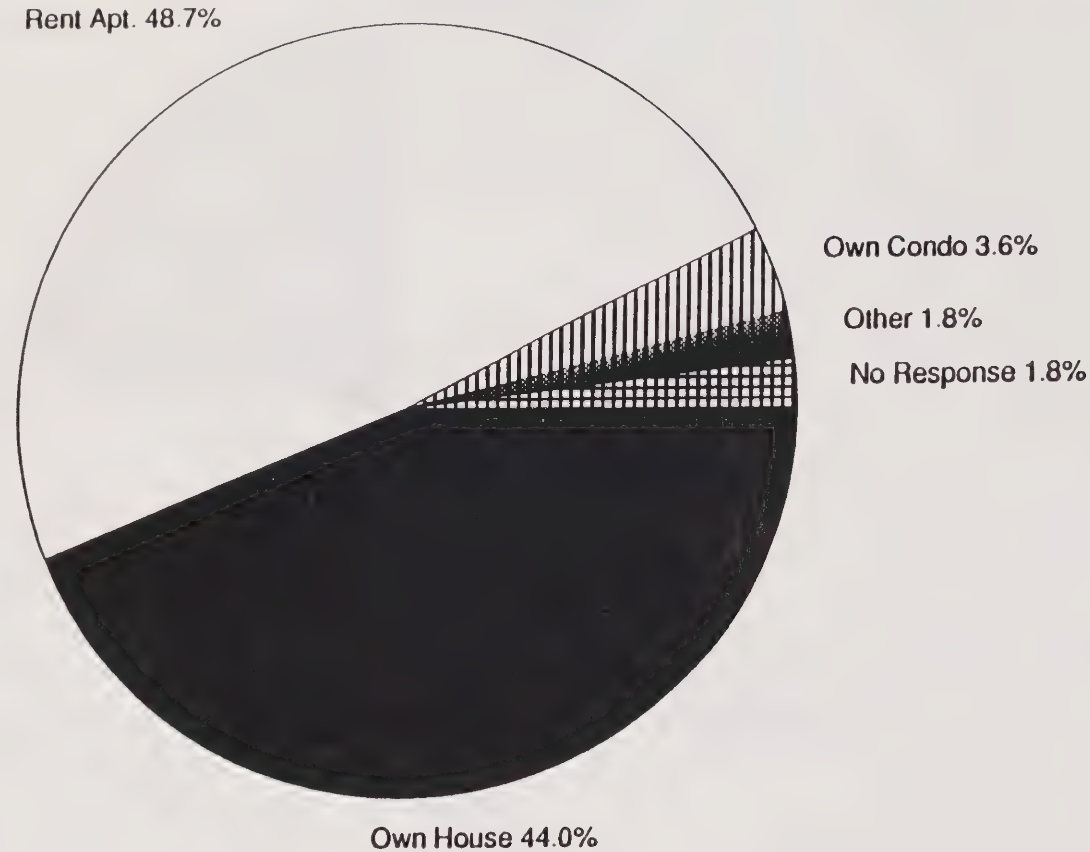
Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

Table R1. Age of Responding Residents and Neighborhood, Allston-Brighton, August 1988.

	Percent of Residents by Age						
Neighborhood	Under 18	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 54	55 to Older	No Response	All Ages
Oak Square	0.0	19.4	22.2	21.9	23.8	0.0	22.1
Washington Heights	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9	0.8	0.0	1.0
Commonwealth Ave.	0.0	22.6	11.1	2.9	4.0	0.0	7.3
N. Allston/N. Brighton	0.0	6.5	21.4	22.9	28.6	50.0	23.2
Union Square	0.0	3.2	8.5	8.6	3.2	0.0	6.3
Brighton Square	100.0	6.5	9.4	5.7	9.5	0.0	8.3
Cleve. Cir./Reservoir	0.0	9.7	6.0	5.7	2.4	25.0	5.2
B.U./S.Allston	0.0	16.1	3.4	2.9	3.2	0.0	4.2
B.C./Chandler Pond	0.0	9.7	2.6	12.4	7.9	0.0	7.6
N.Beacon/Market	0.0	6.5	12.0	13.3	12.7	25.0	12.2
Other	0.0	0.0	2.6	1.0	2.4	0.0	1.8
No Response	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.8
Total (percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total # of Responses	1	31	117	105	126	4	384

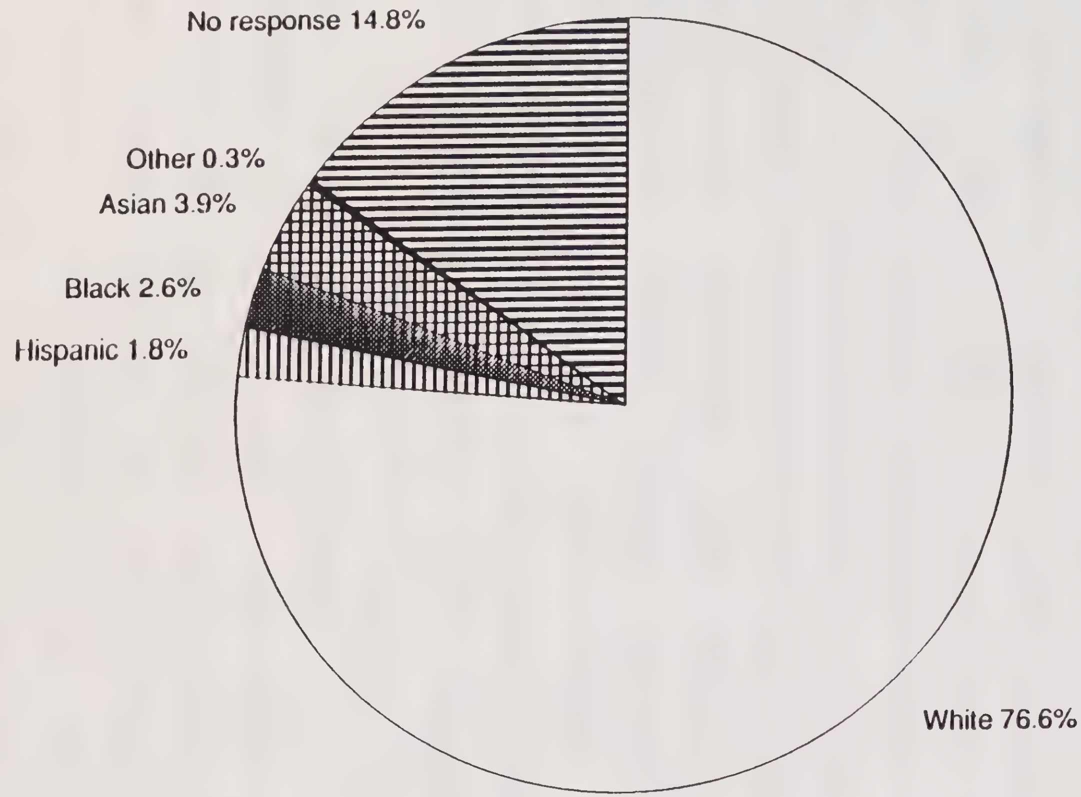
Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

**Figure 3. Allston-Brighton Resident Survey Profile
Type of Residence, August 1988**



Source: BRA Research. Jan. 1990.

Figure 4. Allston-Brighton Resident Survey Profile Racial Composition, August 1988



Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

respond in the proportion to their numbers tended to be younger and transient.

With these characteristics in mind, the respondents to the resident survey showed some clear tendencies related to shopping. Two-thirds of the residents did less than half of their shopping in Allston-Brighton. Forty percent of the residents did less than 25 percent of their shopping in the district. Only 13 percent of the residents did 75 percent or more of their shopping in Allston-Brighton. See Table R2. Residents aged 55 and older tended to do more of their shopping in Allston-Brighton than younger residents. Residents tended to travel more than one mile to shop for household goods and to purchase medical/dental and barber/salon services. See Figure 5. For other items and services, namely groceries, laundry, banking, and drug store items, residents tended to travel less than one mile. The majority of the residents surveyed had the means to travel beyond the immediate neighborhood: 82 percent of the respondents owned a car, which is well above the 66 percent ownership rate found in the 1985 household survey for Allston-Brighton.

The 386 residents who participated in the Allston-Brighton survey were asked to give their impressions of eleven shopping centers in their planning district. More than 80 percent of the participants responded to this question. Of those who answered, impressions of the Soldiers Field/Western Avenue and Brighton Center shopping areas were the most favorable. The results are summarized in Table R3.

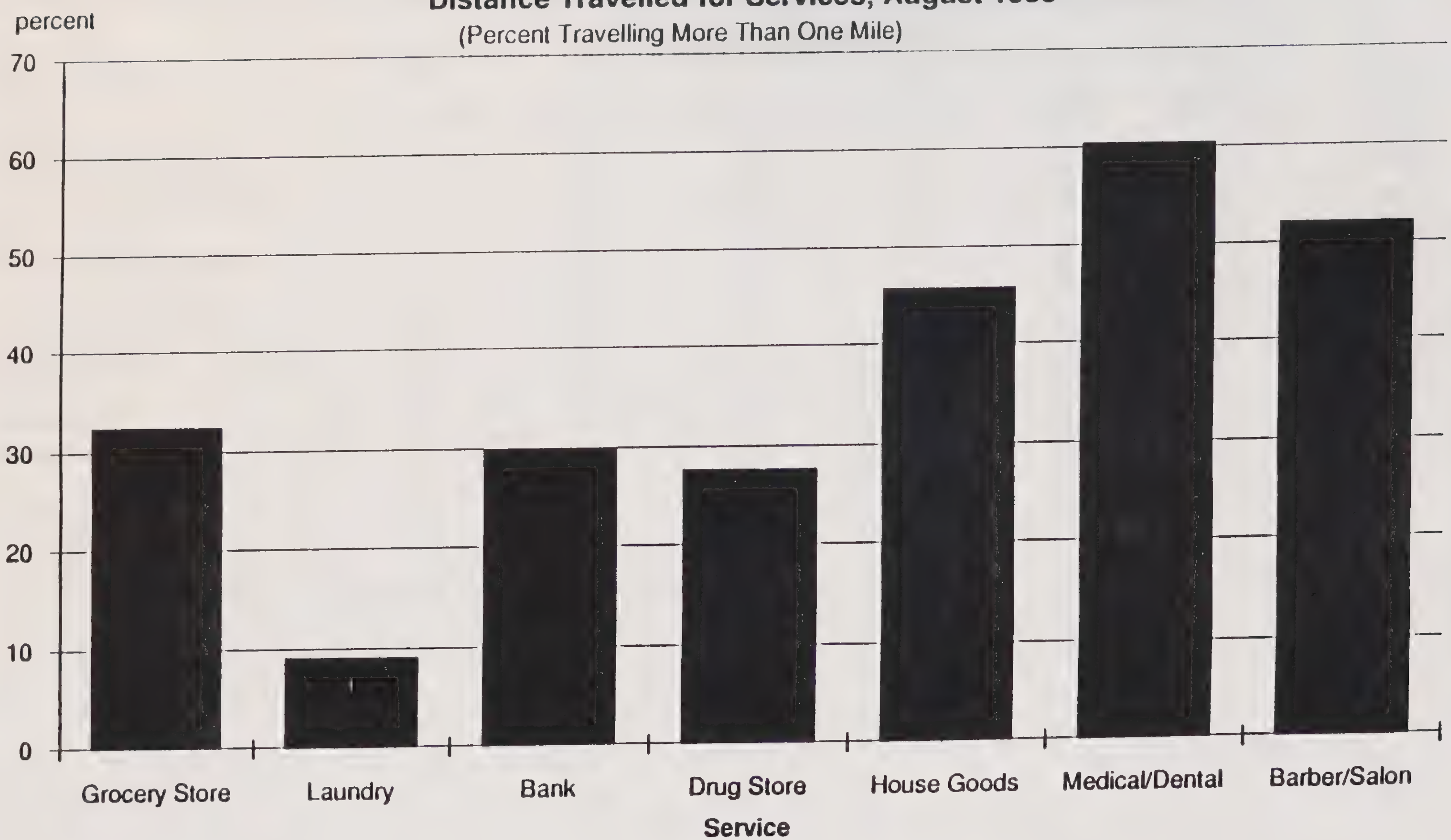
Table R2. Proportion of Shopping Done in Allston-Brighton by Age of Resident, August 1988.

(in percentage of residents)

Percent of Shoping	Percent of Resident by Age						
Done in Allston-Brighton	under 18	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 54	55 to Older	No Respnse	All Age
Less than 25 percent	100.0	41.9	43.6	43.8	33.3	25.0	40.1
25 to 50 percent	0.0	32.3	27.4	22.9	25.4	25.0	25.8
51 to 75 percent	0.0	9.7	16.2	21.9	21.4	0.0	18.8
76 to 100 percent	0.0	12.9	9.4	9.5	16.7	50.0	12.5
No Response	0.0	3.2	3.4	1.9	3.2	0.0	2.9
Total (percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total # of Responses	1	31	117	105	126	4	384

Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

Figure 5. Allston-Brighton Resident Survey Profile
Distance Travelled for Services, August 1988
(Percent Travelling More Than One Mile)



Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

Tabels R3. Resident Impressions of Neighborhood Shopping Areas, Allston-Brighton, August 1988

	Percent of Total Responses						Total
Shopping Area	Very Favorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable	Not Familiar	Total Responses	Number of Responses
Cleveland Circle	4	31	21	12	32	100	280
Soldiers Fld./Western Ave.	17	50	14	4	15	100	311
Brighton Ave./Cambridge St.	2	30	29	14	25	100	269
North Allston	2	13	18	10	57	100	254
Market St./North Beacon St.	3	37	25	9	26	100	269
Comm. Ave./Allston	1	19	28	19	34	100	268
Comm. Ave./Brighton	2	20	23	17	36	100	264
Brighton Center	14	50	19	8	9	100	306
Oak Square	2	19	29	16	34	100	270
Harvard Ave.	8	37	19	17	19	100	282
Union Square	2	17	25	18	38	100	256
All Shopping Areas	5	29	23	13	30	100	

Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

Of the 311 persons who gave their impressions of Soldiers Field/Western Avenue, 17 percent had a "very favorable" impression, 50 percent "favorable", 14 percent "unfavorable", 4 percent "very unfavorable", and 15 percent were "not familiar" with the shopping area.

Brighton Center received 14 percent very favorable, 50 percent favorable, and 27 percent less than favorable impressions; only 9 percent of those responding were not familiar with Brighton Center, also giving it a high familiarity rating.

Regarding all shopping areas in the district, the most common responses were "not familiar" (30 percent of all responses) and "favorable" (29 percent of all responses). These reflect the residents' propensity to shop in their own neighborhoods for some convenience goods and services, and to shop outside of Allston-Brighton for household goods and personal service. For example, residents in Cleveland Circle would be unlikely to shop in Union Square for items found in their own neighborhood, such as newspapers, batteries and liquor.

Among the residents surveyed, the least familiar shopping areas were North Allston, with 57 percent of the respondents noting unfamiliarity, Union Square, with 38 percent, and Commonwealth Avenue/Brighton, with 36 percent of the respondents expressing no familiarity. For business areas, lack of familiarity among resident shoppers would appear to be more common than "very unfavorable" impressions among shoppers.

Five shopping areas did not receive favorable impressions

among more than 20 to 25 percent of the residents in the survey, while the average for all areas was 35 percent. The least favorable rating was found for North Allston, with 15 percent of the respondents giving favorable or very favorable impressions. Union Square, Commonwealth Avenue/Allston, Commonwealth Avenue/Brighton, and Oak Square shopping areas also had less than 25 percent of their rating in the favorable and very favorable categories.

Note that familiarity and favorability ratings of shopping areas are related to the number of resident respondents in the respective areas. The large role of convenience shopping in neighborhood business districts implies that residents from other neighborhoods would be less familiar with shops than nearby residents. This survey did not weight responses to account for imbalances in the number of responses between neighborhoods.

To complement the resident survey and its shopping information, the BRA conducted a survey of businesses in the neighborhoods of Allston-Brighton.

Business Survey: 96 completed questionnaires

The responding business establishments were representative of the types of businesses found in Allston-Brighton by other BRA sources. One quarter of the businesses were retail shops, 8 percent were manufacturing firms, and the remaining 68 percent were a variety of service, finance, and other commercial establishments. See Figure 6.

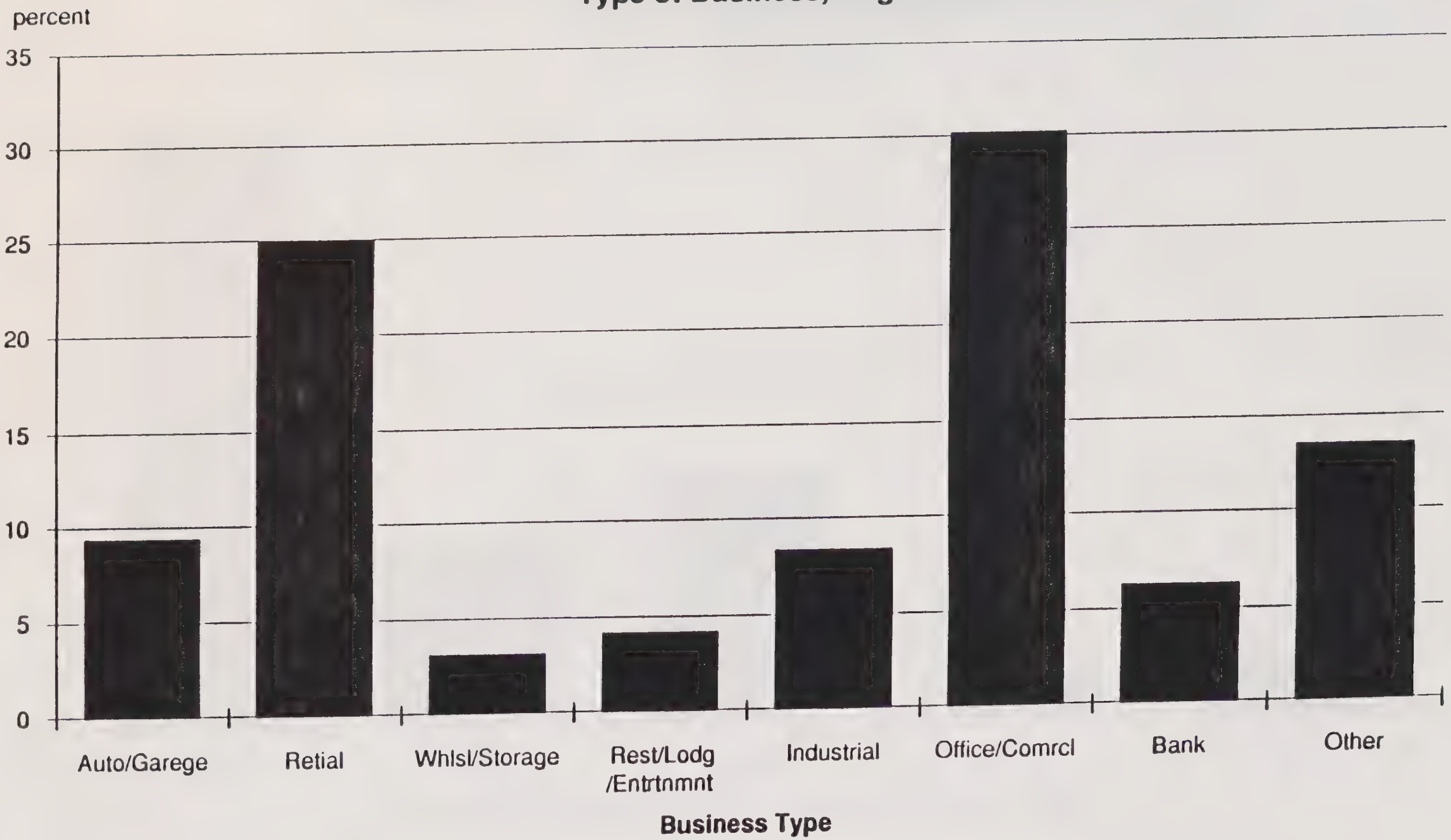
Businesses were mostly small. More than half of the businesses that answered the survey had fewer than 10 employees, and another 37 percent had between 10 and 50 employees.

The establishments in the survey were largely clustered in Brighton Center and Brighton Avenue/Harvard Avenue/Cambridge Street. The remaining third of the respondents were mostly in the Commonwealth Avenue and Western Avenue/Soldiers Field areas.

Most of the businesses in the survey were long-established in the area: 74 percent had operated in Allston-Brighton for more than 10 years. Only 5 percent had operated for less than two years. Yet, most of the businesses, 55 percent, rented their floor space at their Allston-Brighton location.

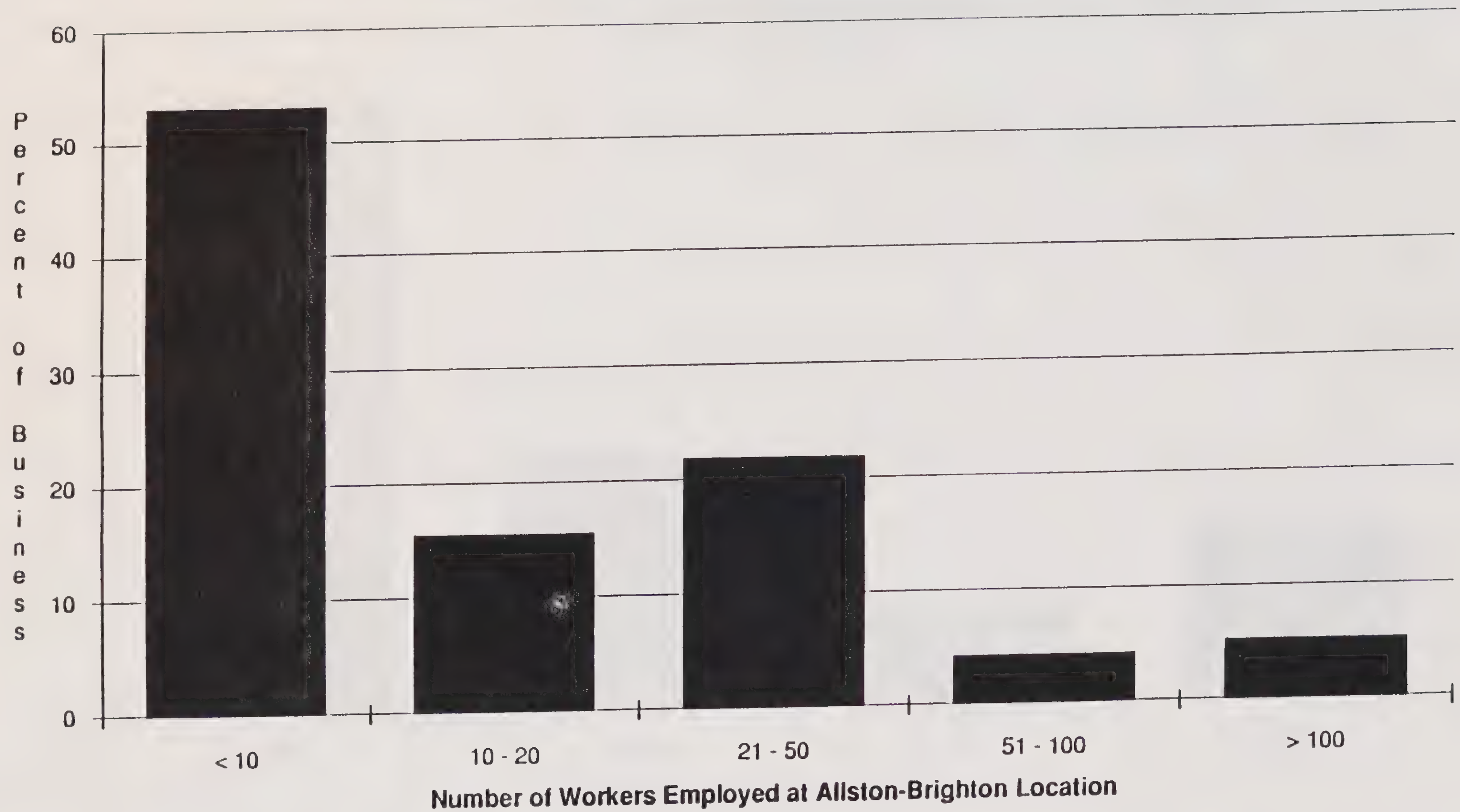
Businesses tended to employ nonresidents to a greater degree than residents of Allston-Brighton. Of those answering the survey, 53 percent had less than a quarter of their respective workforces living in Allston-Brighton. The resident employees made up more than half of the workforce in 24 percent of the workplaces. See Figure 8. These findings are consistent with commuting patterns for Boston and reflect the proximity of

Figure 6. Allston-Brighton Business Survey Profile
Type of Business, August 1988



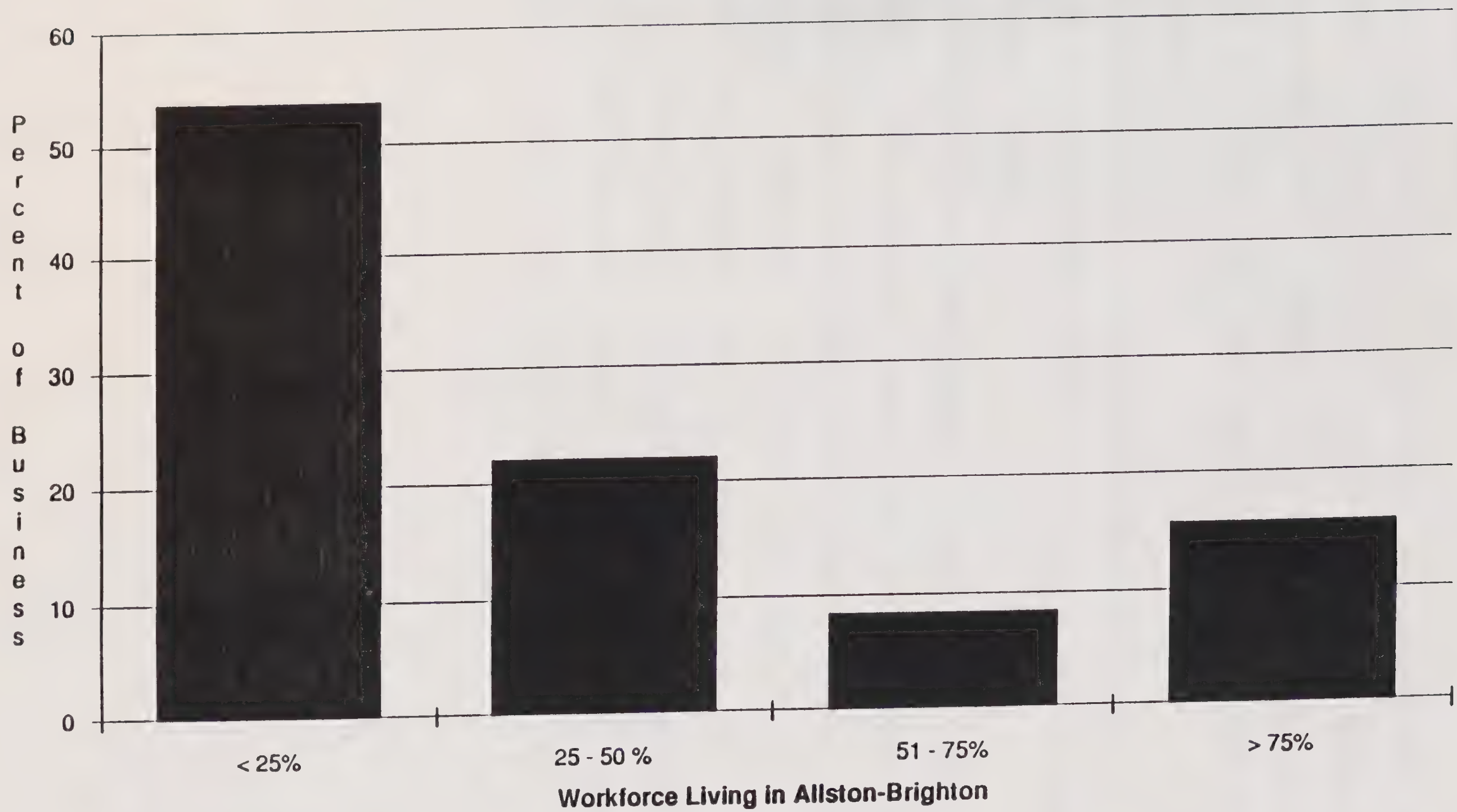
Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

Figure 7. Allston-Brighton Business Survey Profile
Number of Employees by Business, August 1988



Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

Figure 8. Allston-Brighton Business Survey Profile
Workforce Residency, August 1988



Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

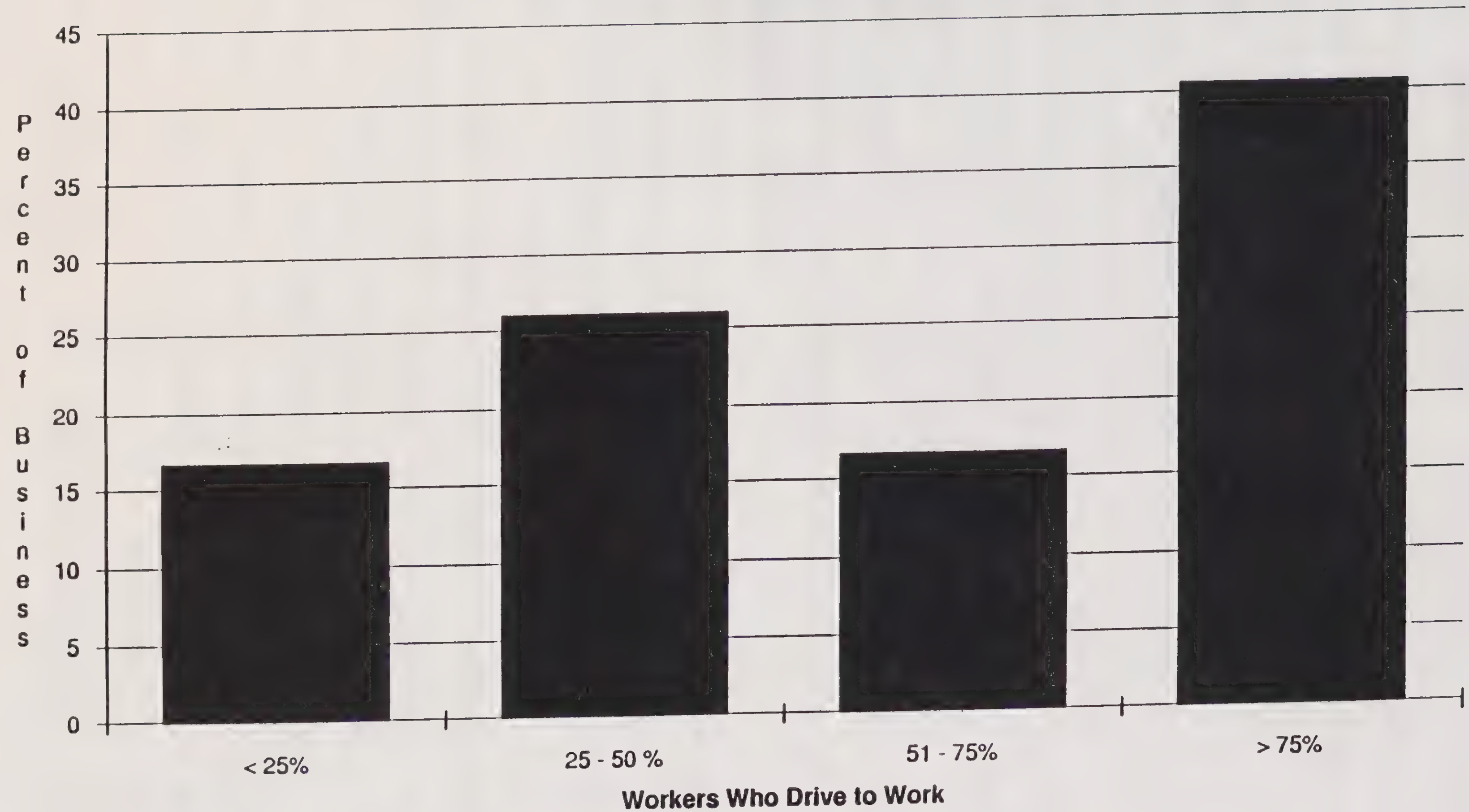
Allston-Brighton to the Massachusetts turnpike, Cambridge, Newton, and other suburbs.

Driving to work appeared to be common for people who work in Allston-Brighton. Forty percent of the business respondents estimated that more than 75 percent of their employees drive to work. Another 17 percent answered that 51 to 75 percent drive to work. See Figure 9.

Concerning parking in the surveyed business areas, 70 percent of the businesses reported an inadequate supply of on-street and public parking.

Allston-Brighton businesses showed interest in a new industrial park in the area, but most would not locate in such a park. Businesses were asked: Does Allston-Brighton need a new industrial park? A majority, 47 percent, answered "no"; 33 percent "yes"; and 20 percent did not respond. The 96 respondents were asked whether they would consider locating their businesses in a new industrial park. Only 21 percent answered "yes", with 65 percent in the negative and 14 percent not responding.

Figure 9. Allston-Brighton Business Survey Profile
Worker's Commute, August 1988



Source: BRA Research, Jan. 1990.

Comments on the Survey Methods

The survey methods were simple. The department distributed questionnaires to 1,500 homes in 15 neighborhoods. For each street selected, the field workers delivered a questionnaire to every house on the street. Residents mailed back 386 completed questionnaires, or 26 percent of those distributed. For the business survey, the department called 300 businesses listed by the Allston or Brighton Boards of Trade or the Economic Development Industrial Corporation of Boston, which are about one-third of all business establishments in the Allston-Brighton district. From the 300 calls, the department found 230 businesses that agreed to fill out a questionnaire. Of those, 97 respondents, or one-third of the businesses that were called, mailed in completed surveys.

The simplicity had its drawbacks. First, the resident sample was not randomly selected, which prevented use of the results in statistical analysis and weakened any generalization of the results to all residents. The results described the respondents, but did not provide clear insight into all resident shoppers. In short, the results are biased by the lack of a a proper sampling technique. Second, many of the questions lack clarity, and many did not produce unambiguous, reliable responses. Third, some of the questions were too open-ended to elicit responses that could be categorized, summarized, or analyzed.

If these surveys were to be replicated for other

neighborhoods, several improvements in the methods would produce much more reliable results. The intention of the survey designers was to keep the survey simple. Simplicity need not be sacrificed to clarity. While the questionnaires (included as Appendix A and B) have not been rewritten, the following changes are examples to consider for future neighborhood surveys.

Foremost, the resident survey should incorporate random sampling techniques. For analysis of several neighborhoods within the planning district, a stratified sampling technique or some weighting scheme would be desirable. The mail-back survey technique introduces bias in the sample, but alternative methods, namely telephone or personal surveys, would be much more time-consuming and costly for the BRA.

The business survey design had fewer faults. The researchers attempted to reach all businesses, not a sample. The one-third of the businesses that did respond may not represent the non-responding businesses if size of establishment, availability of a manager, local ownership, or other such factors determined the response rate. Lacking compulsory measures, the researchers had to rely on the good will or interest of the businesses.

The business survey questions were reasonably clear. However, the "land use" questions on the business survey, 21-24, were probably not worth including. The respondents did not appear to be knowledgeable about nor interested in the industrial park issue.

On the resident questionnaire, question 10 asked for age, race, sex, marital status, and income without instructions regarding to whom the questions pertain; the respondent only? the members of the household? In particular, the income question needed clarification regarding whose income, when, and what kind of income could be included. As it stood, answers to the income question could not be compiled or analyzed. A better approach would be to specify on the questionnaire that answers should be entered for each person in the living unit, that income should be all wage and salary income, plus interest, dividends, gifts, etc. and that separate or combined household incomes should be reported.

Questions 4 and 7 deviated from the multiple choice or ranking format to, instead, allow a wide range of written answers. The results were difficult to categorize and analyze. The multiple choice format would probably work better in a mail-back questionnaire for both the respondent and the analyst. The respondent could be given one open-ended question to add comments that may not have been elicited by the multiple choice or ranking questions.

RESIDENT SURVEY

Please answer the questions as fully as you are able. If you are unsure about any of the answers (for example, the percentages requested), just give us your best estimate. Of course you are free to skip any question you would rather not answer; but, please remember, we need all the information you can provide to achieve the best results. Please return the survey in the enclosed postage paid envelope as soon as possible. Thank you.

1. In which Allston-Brighton neighborhood do you live?

____ Oak Square
____ Washington Heights
____ Commonwealth Avenue
____ No. Allston/No. Brighton
____ Union Square
____ Brighton Center
____ Cleveland Circle/Reservoir
____ B.U. area/South Allston
____ B.C. Area/Chandler's Pond
____ Other, please specify
____

2. Approximately what portion of your shopping do you do in Allston-Brighton? Check one

____ Less than 25%
____ 25 to 50%
____ 51 to 75%
____ 76 to 100%

3. Do you usually purchase the following items in Allston-Brighton? Check if yes

____ Food
____ Furniture
____ Large Appliances
____ Autos
____ Garden Products
____ Stereo/Video Products
____ Clothes
____ Hardware
____ Small Appliances
____ Auto Parts
____ Prescription Drugs

4. Please list any items that you currently do not purchase in Allston-Brighton but would like to if they were more readily available.

____

____

5. From the list below please tell us which shopping areas you shop in the most. Rank from 1 to 3 the three areas you shop in most often, with 1 being the area you shop in most often, 2 that area you shop in second most often, and 3 that area you shop in third most often.

____ Cleveland Circle
____ Soldiers Field/Western Ave.
____ Brighton Ave./Cambridge St.
____ North Allston
____ Market St./No.Beacon St.
____ Other, please specify
____
____ Commonwealth Avenue/Allston
____ Commonwealth Avenue/Brighton
____ Brighton Center
____ Oak Square
____ Harvard Avenue
____ Union Square

6. Please tell us how you view each of the shopping areas below. The categories are as follows:

1 = Very favorably
2 = Favorably
3 = Unfavorably
4 = Very unfavorably
5 = Not familiar

____ Cleveland Circle
____ Soldiers Field/Western Ave.
____ Brighton Ave./Cambridge St.
____ North Allston
____ Market St./No.Beacon St.
____ Other, please specify
____
____ Commonwealth Avenue/Allston
____ Commonwealth Avenue/Brighton
____ Brighton Center
____ Oak Square
____ Harvard Avenue
____ Union Square

7. What problems, if any, do you experience when shopping in Allston-Brighton? Please be specific.

____

____

8. Please identify where you shop most often <u>outside</u> of Allston-Brighton. Check one

____ Chestnut Hill Mall
____ Downtown Boston
____ Arsenal Mall
____ Harvard Square
____ Other Cambridge
____ Other, please specify ______________

9. Please tell us how far you have to travel from your home to reach each of the following:

Fill in the proper letter for the distance that best answers this question in your neighborhood.

A = Less than half a mile
B = Half a mile to a mile
C = One mile to two miles
D = More than two miles

How far must you travel to get to the:

____ Grocery Store
____ Laundromat/Dry Cleaning
____ Bank
____ Drug Store
____ Household Goods
____ Medical/Dental Services
____ Barber/Beautician

10. What is your

Age:

____ Under 18
____ 18 to 24
____ 25 to 34
____ 35 to 54
____ 55 or over

Race:

____ White
____ Hispanic
____ Black
____ Asian
____ Other

Sex:

____ Male
____ Female

Marital Status:

____ Single
____ Married

Income:

____ Less than $10,000
____ $10,000 to $14,999
____ $15,000 to $19,999
____ $20,000 to $29,999
____ $30,000 to $49,999
____ $50,000 and over

11. Are you a full-time student:

____ Yes
____ No

12. Number of years living in Allston-Brighton:

____ Less than 2
____ 2 to 5
____ 6 to 10
____ More than 10

13. Do you: Check one

____ Own the house you live in
____ Rent the apartment you live in
____ Own the condominium you live in
____ Other, please specify ______________

14. Do you own a car:

____ Yes
____ No

15. What is the number in your family with whom you live?

____ 1
____ 2
____ 3
____ Other
____ 4
____ 5
____ 6

Thank you very much for taking part in the survey. Please return it as soon as possible.

BUSINESS SURVEY

Please answer all the questions as fully as you are able. If you are unsure about any of the answers, just give us your best estimate. You are free to skip any question you would rather not answer; however, we need all the information you can provide to achieve the best results. Please return the survey as soon as possible in the enclosed postage paid envelope. Thank you.

1. Type of Business? Check one

___ Auto/Garage
___ Retail
___ Wholesale/Storage
___ Other, please specify
____
___ Restaurant/Lodging/Entertainment
___ Industrial
___ Office and other commercial

2. General Vicinity of Business? Check one

___ Market St./No. Beacon St.
___ Commonwealth Ave.
___ Oak Square
___ Other, Please Specify
____
___ Brighton Center
___ Brighton Ave/Harvard Ave/Cambridge St.
___ Western Ave/Soldiers Field Road
___ Cleveland Circle

3. Years operating in Allston-Brighton? Check one

___ Less than 2
___ 2 to 5
___ 6 to 10
___ more than 10

4. How many employees are currently on the payroll at this location?

___ Less than 10
___ 10 to 20
___ 21 to 50
___ 51 to 100
___ More than 100

5. What percent of your workforce lives in Allston-Brighton?

___ Less than 25%
___ 25 to 50%
___ 51 to 75%
___ More than 75%

6. What percent of your workers drive to work?

___ Less than 25%
___ 25 to 50%
___ 51 to 75%
___ More than 75%

7. Do you provide on-site parking for your employees?

___ Yes. If so, how many spaces? _______
___ No

8. What percent of your customers/clients live in Allston-Brighton?

___ Less than 25%
___ 25 to 50%
___ 51 to 75%
___ More than 75%

9. What percent of your customers/clients drive to your business?

___ Less than 25%
___ 25 to 50%
___ 51 to 75%
___ More than 75%

10. Do you provide on-site parking for your customers/clients?

___ Yes. If so, how many spaces? _______
___ No

11. The supply of public and on-street parking in your area is: Check one

___ Adequate
___ Inadequate

12. Do you own or rent the building in which you do business? (Optional)

___ Own ___ Rent

13. Do you expect to continue operating your business in this community? (Optional)

___ Yes ___ No. If not, why not? ______________________

14. Are you planning to expand your business in your current location? (Optional)

___ Yes ___ No

15. Do you experience difficulties making or receiving deliveries at this location?

___ Yes. Please describe ______________________
___ No

16. What local factors interfere most with growth of your business? Please list

____

____

Land Use Questions

17. Does Allston-Brighton need a new industrial park?

___ Yes ___ No

18. If a new industrial park were built here would you consider locating your business in it?

___ Yes ___ No

19. What areas in Allston-Brighton have the most potential for business development? Please list.

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20. What changes or improvements would contribute most to a better "Business Climate" in Allston-Brighton? Please list.

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21. Please use the remaining space to discuss any favorable or unfavorable impressions you may have of the current business climate in Allston-Brighton, or of the quality of life in Allston-Brighton.

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Thank you for participating in this survey.
Please return it as soon as possible.